

Levine, Amy-Jill and Douglas Knight. *The Meaning of the Bible: What the Jewish Scriptures and Christian Old Testament Can Teach Us*. New York: HarperOne, 2011.

## Chapter Two

Readers are here introduced to the 'literary heritage' of ancient Israel. By that they mean such things as genre; title (should the Old Testament be called that or 'Hebrew Bible' or 'Tanakh'?); translation; literary conventions (or tropes); characterizations; form criticism; and finally, canonization.

As was true of the first chapter, this chapter too is designed not so much for the specialist as it is the beginner/ intermediate student of Scripture. And yet, there are – even for the skilled – enjoyments.

If we read the story of creation as science, as those who promote 'creationism' or 'intelligent design' are wont to do, we again confuse genre (p. 44)

say they in their discussion of genre.

The Jewish canon ends not with a prediction of a future fulfillment [as the Christian canon does], but with a look back home (p. 47)

they do opine while describing translations.

An Italian proverb, 'A translator, a traitor' (p. 48)

reminds readers of the Bible, and the present volume, that when it comes to translations every single one has shortcomings. Indeed- even the translation of the Italian proverb in question is rendered (or renderable) differently by different persons. I'd translate it 'Every translator is a traitor'. Here it is- decide for yourself- 'ogni traduttore è un traditore.' If that's true of a simple line in Italian, what must the difficulties be of translating Hebrew into Greek!

When it comes to form criticism, L. and K. correctly suggest

Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis survived well into the twentieth century, but has come under fire in more recent times (p. 71).

I know a number of skilled exegetes who have yet to understand that simple fact and who, therefore, could benefit from a careful reading of this introduction.

Finally, in discussing the canon

More likely, for the Hebrew scriptures, the Septuagint, and even the New Testament, the canonization process was as much, if not more, a matter of popular support than elite mandate (p. 73).

Would that this sage sentence (and the discussion surrounding it) bring an end to the oft-repeated Jamnia myth!

Wittily (I think) does the chapter conclude thusly

The synagogue gives the book of Esther its own holiday (Purim); Luther wanted to toss it from the canon; typically, the only time it is cited in churches is on the Sunday dedicated to the women's group, where the reading is Esther 4:14, 'for just such a time as this' (p. 74).

Just as Esther happened to come on the scene at the precise moment determined by providence, so too Levine's and Knight's work. It is, thus far, proving itself the right book at the right, just the right, time. It has what students need and it manages to offer at the same time further hints at deeper research.

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